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Romanian Civil Service Barometer, 2004

- Summary -

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Objectives

This survey, based on a complex questionnaire elaborated by the Institute for Public Policy (IPP) and Gallup Organization Romania and implemented by the latter, has three main objectives:

- to highlight the main *priorities* and *constraints* of the civil service, as they are perceived by the civil servants themselves;
- to develop a *comparative perspective* between the civil service and other professional segments in terms of career prospects, job opportunities, remuneration etc.;
- to provide an objective *diagnosis* of the current stage of reform implementation in local public administration in Romania, viewed by its very beneficiaries - the civil servants;

Methodology

The field research was conducted by Gallup Organization Romania between September 27 - October 18, 2004.

Data collection was carried out through self-conducted questionnaires, each consisting of 86 items, on a sample of 993 civil servants from local public institutions.

Sampling was designed on a three-stadium, probabilistic basis, with distinct samples for each category selected: civil servants, institutions and departments. Questionnaires have been conducted in all 42 administrative units (41 County Councils and the General County of Bucharest) and in 83 mayoralties of municipality and towns. Selection of the 83 local urban units and the institutional departments (as they appear in the organization chart of each selected institution) was probabilistic.

Results of the survey are representative for the population of civil servants from local public administration of Romania, with a tolerated error of 3%.

Main findings

Usually, quantitative studies in this field focus on measuring external indexes, analyzing citizens' perception on public institutions and authorities, while the *Romanian Civil Service Barometer* approaches a new, inner-system based perspective. For some items, answers are further segregated on other categories, such as sex or type of civil servant¹, in order to analyze whether results vary on such variables.

The main findings of the Barometer are concentrated in six chapters, each dealing with a particular aspect of the Romanian civil service: stability and career prospects, resources in local public administration, recruiting, evaluation, monitoring and promotion procedures, work environment, payment and perceptions over reform efficiency.

1. Stability and career prospects in civil service

Concerning career prospects in civil service, hard figures show rather a pessimistic situation, as 42% of the civil servants questioned say that they have thought about looking for a new job in the past year. Most of those who declare this (43%) are interested in moving to the private sector and 11 percent of the total number of civil servants are decided to test their entrepreneurial skills in the next 5 years.

When speaking about stability in Romanian civil service, our data reveal a controversial reality. Although the specific legal framework is designed in such a manner as to protect the civil servant from any arbitrary decision and political interference, figures show a spectacular "renewal" of the public administration, shortly after the local elections of June, 2004. The rate of position fluctuation² inside the system in the past four months is 5 times higher than that of the similar period of 2003. Political changes may not be indeed the exclusive cause of such a phenomenon, but the significant shifts from last year cannot be ignored.

2. Resources in local public administration

Items of this chapter attempt to evaluate both professional skills of human resources in local public administration such as knowledge of a foreign language or ability to work with computers, and access to alternative resources, mainly for acquiring useful information in daily activities.

A vast majority of the civil servants (85%) declare a conversational knowledge of a foreign language, and almost all of them have primary skills in working with a computer (15% having an ECDL³ recognition).

¹ Managerial versus operative level.

² Both on a vertical scale (promotion or demoting), and a horizontal one (moving from one department to another)

³ European Computer Driving License

Main sources of information are line managers (for 84% of the civil servants), colleagues, internal written notifications, staff meetings, Internet and media. In terms of utility, the most appreciated source of information is the Internet, followed by recommendations received from line managers.

Although more than one third of the civil servants are members of a trade union, 57% of them feel that their interests are not properly represented by such organizations.

3. A professional civil service. Recruitment, evaluation, monitoring and promotion of civil servants

Although working in public institutions may appear to some civil servants as a temporary compromise, more than three quarters of the respondents (76%) declare they lack proper training and that they are willing to learn in order to improve their professional performance. At the same time, there is an obvious need for improvement in the manner of acceding to certain training programs, as the current practice is that of arbitrary nomination/recommendation from the line managers.

Again, perception over abuse and political interference in the recruitment process is quite widespread among civil servants, as 40% of them appreciate personal connections with leaders from public institutions as being the most important factor when trying to apply for a job in the public sector.

Evaluation grids and performance standards are generally perceived as being well elaborated and able to establish a proper ranking among civil servants, while promotion and pecuniary stimulation are often seen as less transparent practices.

4. Work environment in local public administration

Work environment in Romanian local administration is perceived as being highly inertial: 70% of the civil servants consider that both their managers and their colleagues are resistant to change. Despite this, a significant percentage feel proud to work in a public institution (68%) and say that individual initiative and decisional autonomy are encouraged at the workplace.

Contrary to the common belief that managers work more than their employees, in local public administration almost half of the line and top management civil servants (41%) say they do not work extra-hours, compared to only 18% of the ones at the operative level. Team working and mutual help are habitual for only half of the Romanian civil servants, although a vast majority (81%) consider that they do have friends among their colleagues.

Discrimination is not a common practice in local public administration, although there are some cases of civil servants declaring they felt discriminated on a gender, age or political affiliation basis.

Political interference in hiring new civil servants or preferential treatment for those being members of the same party as the elected officials of the institution (President of the County Council or mayor) are almost perceived as natural in local public administration by half of the questioned civil servants, indicating again serious deficiencies in terms of understating the scope and mission of civil service.

When speaking about factors with major influence on work performance, a higher salary would be, by far, the main impetus for a quality work in local public administration for nearly 90% of the civil servants, followed by adequate training (51%), merit-based promotions (39%) and purchasing of high-quality equipment (36%).

5. Payment of civil servants

Results of the Barometer confirm that low salaries continue to be the main shortcoming of Romanian civil service. With no exception, civil servants think that they should be paid more, the average raising considered for a medium net salary of 5.4 million ROL being a doubling of this amount. At the same time, a cut of 15% would determine more than half of the civil servants (55%) to leave their jobs.

Although payment is generally considered to be too low (80% of the civil servants are discontent with their actual salary), people still work in public institutions because of job safety (60%), opportunity to serve community's interests (32%) or simply because they do not have any other options (30%).

6. Perceptions over reforms' efficiency in local public administration

62% of the civil servants consider that corruption is a general phenomenon in Romania and another significant percent - 57%, think that authorities have taken no or too little action to fight against it. Even when some anti-corruption measures have been adopted by the Executive, these are considered rather inefficient by more than half of the respondents.

The situation is quite dramatic as far as perceptions over the reform of paying system in local public administration are concerned, as 91% of the civil servants are profoundly discontent with it.

Low payment is also seen by the majority of the civil servants as the main obstacle to consolidating an ethically appropriate behavior at the workplace, followed at a significant distance by citizens' inappropriate approach towards public institutions, lack of a clear mission of the civil service and lack of organizational culture.

Future prospects and aspirations for improving Romanian civil service are almost equally distributed among civil servants between gaining real independence from the political apparatus (36%), increasing the general standards of performance in local public administration (26%), improving the internal management of local public institutions (22%) and adopting an appropriate strategy for reforming the public system (15%).